LETTERS

Real Readiness Depends On Stabilizing Soldiers in Units

Dear Sir:

I found CPT Henderson's article about training focus to be insightful and practical (Nov-Dec '01). The need to focus training on a limited number of tasks, to use battle drills and, in general, to keep things simple in this high-OPTEMPO world are all right on target. I would suggest, however, that until the Army fixes the personnel turbulence problem in our tactical units, efforts such as those advocated by CPT Henderson will have only limited utility.

As a tanker who has led armor units from platoon to battalion and served as an observer-controller at the CMTC, I have seen at close hand the terrible effect of personnel turnover on unit readiness. Here is just one example: All tankers know well the hoops we go through to stabilize tank crews for a gunnery density only to see PLDC, BNCOC, ANCOC, and/or the must-fill-it-now general's aide job screw it up. Then immediately upon return from gunnery, what happens to the unit? Roger — we emasculate it with the summer PCS cycle, other reassignments, and changes of command just so we can start over for the next training event.

History teaches us, and we know what works — individuals training together over a long period of time develop not just their individual task proficiency but also their expertise as a smoothly functioning team. All of us have at one time or another served in a unit that has deployed for a peacekeeping mission, performed an Intrinsic Action rotation or conducted a CTC rotation. We know the benefits of training a stable team for 3 to 6 months and then "fighting" with that team. Anyone who has been lucky enough to be in a unit where large numbers of unit leaders have been together through more than one of these kinds of missions has experienced those magical qualities we call cohesion and teamwork. The tremendous increase in battlefield prowess that is possible under these conditions is significant and obvious. We know what right looks like; we just can't get there from here.

Until the Army can find a way to stabilize soldiers in tactical units in a way that takes into account their training and deployment schedules, armor leaders will struggle merely to maintain a minimal level of readiness. In effect, the Army currently trains individuals who happen to be assigned to particular units. The good of the soldiers [i.e., his career] is more important than the unit's readiness to fight. Until we reverse this logic by training units, not just individuals, we will never be ready to fight and win on short notice.

LTC TIMOTHY R. REESE
U.S. Army War College

An Author Responds Regarding Kubinka Museum Article

Dear Sir:

I'd like to thank Steve Zaloga for his comments about my article, "The Secret Museum at Kubinka" (*ARMOR*, September-October 2001). Since he has visited the museum and written about the vehicles in the collection, his viewpoint is a valuable one. I do, however disagree with his comments concerning a "lack of interest" in the post-war U.S. vehicles in the collection. On the contrary, descriptions and photo confirmation of U.S. vehicles in former Soviet hands are not only very rare, but are very interesting to those unable to visit collections like the one at Kubinka.

While the U.S. vehicles themselves are obviously well known, the interest lies in which vehicles are included and how they got to Kubinka. In fact, the small number of books that have been published dealing with the vehicles at Kubinka normally include very limited information about the U.S. vehicles, or they avoid the subject entirely. While the former Soviet vehicles at Kubinka provide important information about the hardware of our former enemy, the non-Soviet/Russian vehicles in the collection provide valuable insights into what that same former enemy considered to be important.

JIM WARFORD

Along with the Digital Gee-Whiz, Let's Keep Our Paper Manuals

Dear Sir:

I recently completed your November-December magazine and was encouraged by CSM Christian's article on the incorporation of electronic manuals in the 19-series Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Courses. It appears that we are taking positive steps to keep up with trends in civilian education. However, as a line unit user of many of the same publications, I am appalled at the consequences of the Army's "less-paper" policies. To completely replace mass publication of hard copies, particularly of field manuals and technical manuals, is simply wrongheaded. In recent months, it has become impossible to procure previously common manuals such as 19-series STPs; *FM 17-95, Cavalry Operations*; *FM 22-5, Drill and Ceremonies*; or even TMs for our M40/M42 protective masks. Although some publications are out of circulation for regular revision, frequently the new versions are released only in electronic format or "on-line." I was astonished to learn that the new *FM 17-12, Tank Gunnery* will be available almost exclusively over the internet.

It's a nice idea, and I am sure it saves many training dollars. Still, there is no laptop computer on a tank or scout platoon's list of basic issue items. As yet, no TACLAN (Tactical Local Area Network) has materialized on the screen line. Our often-abused mechanics must now master the task of keeping the FRH (Flame Resistant Hydraulic fluid) off one last finger to save the computer mouse pad. Sure, we could print out the needed pages on the unit's single stuttering ink jet, but we'll have to predict the needed pages in advance. Probably more than 300 pages will require another $30 ink cartridge and more than 5,000 pages a new printer. Shifting the cost to the unit budget is neither fair nor efficient in terms of printing costs. Let's not even explore the rumor that the Army wishes to dispose of paper maps. I can see it now, the entire troop leadership gathered in the commander's turret for the operations order...

I am not a Luddite. There is merit in the plan to convert many manuals to electronic format, and I find that I prefer ETMs (Electronic Technical Manuals) *for certain purposes.* Nevertheless, hard copies (to include maps!) furnished by a centralized publications system remain a vital need at the pointy end. As my gunner put it: "Sir, I've never dragged a monitor into the can with me. People might wonder."

1LT JOSEPH BERG
A/1-7 Cav

TOW-HMMWV's Thermal Sight Works Fine for Light Cavalry

Dear Sir:

Just finished reading the November-December issue, and I felt compelled to write in response to the article, "Breaking the Reconnaissance Code," by CPT Eric Shaw. Overall, CPT Shaw's article was very informative, particularly his scout training plan. However, CPT Shaw makes some assertions in his article that need closer scrutiny. He writes about how the CFV has a distinct advantage over the HMMWV because of its thermal capabilities. This comment is true only if the HMMWV isn't equipped with a TOW, a weapon system common to all scout platoons in a light cavalry troop. Having been in two light cavalry troops, the TOW was a tool utilized numerous times to gather information on mounted and dismounted enemy assets at the Joint Readiness Training Center and other training areas.

The other point I'd like to discuss is CPT Shaw's point that OPFOR scouts are more effective than their BLUFOR counterparts because, "…they are afraid to die." He then writes that BLUFOR scouts, "…lack…the will to wage war and do their job the proper way." I couldn't disagree more. Having seen the OPFOR scouts from both a BLUFOR and OC perspective, they are successful because they know how to "play the game."

From covering their MILES head halos with the front flap of the boonie caps to using rifle sights to using Vaseline on their torso sensors, the OPFOR are good because they train on the same ground month after month and year after year. They have the opportunity to create and hone field SOPs because they spend two weeks out of every month implementing them. They face the same scenarios month after month. Most BLUFOR units don't have the ability to spend that much time in the field. While this might sound like whining to some, my only point is that the OPFOR have several advantages to begin with and that is the main reason they have success.

A true test of a unit's proficiency would be to take them and a unit from a CTC and have them fight on a neutral piece of ground. While this isn't very realistic, we as leaders must be careful not to fall prey to the idea that training center units are that much better tactically than their counterparts.

T.J. JOHNSON
CPT, Armor
Fort Knox, Ky.

Tankers Lose MOS Skills When Deployed in IBCT Units

Dear Sir:

The article "Medium Gun System Platoons" by 2LT Brian P. Hurley (*ARMOR,* Sep-Oct '01, page 7) is fascinating in what it reveals about the organization. Let me begin by commending the author for a clear and concise report. He is obviously proud of his unit and its performance, and rightfully so. The MGS platoons are evidently performing well and satisfying their infantry leaders. And that's exactly the problem.

A soldier spends most of his career training for the short, brief experience spent in battle. Success in combined arms operation presupposes skillful proficiency among the various participants. It's wonderful when resources permit realistic combined arms training, but this is obviously not the case at Fort Lewis as tankers lose their MOS skills while being retrained as dismounted infantry.

I do not wish to dwell on tactics, but some of the items mentioned in the article are plainly wrong. Using the sole MGS to breach barbed wire with a grappling hook while the infantry platoon's squad IAVs are standing by makes no sense. Neither does dismounting the MGS NCOs to lead infantry squads.

In 1978-79, I was a tank platoon leader at Fort Lewis. My platoon habitually supported a mechanized infantry company. We were frequently misused, and over time performed similar ill-conceived tasks and reorganizations to those discussed in the article and encountered most of the very same problems. [One time, I was actually told to dismount my platoon and assault a MOUT facility on foot (20 men with .45 cal pistols and 10 M3 "grease guns" between us). It was supposed to be "good training," but I flatly refused and common sense prevailed.] At least we had a parent company and battalion commander to protect us and fall back on for training, maintenance, and support.

Another problem with a three-MGS platoon is rank structure. Assuming an autoloader in the MGS (meaning a three-man crew), we are creating 9-man platoons. This is ludicrous and won't last. We need to either make the platoons larger or we will eventually see them broken up into individual vehicles organic to the infantry IAV platoons.

We now see armor's role in the vaunted Interim Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), and it is a sorry sight. As the proponent for the MGS, Armor Branch has abrogated its responsibility to its tankers. It allowed stripping away battalion and company commanders and dumped individual platoons to fend for themselves and be broken up even further by infantry company commanders who are focused on completely different training tasks.

Ideally, there should be an MGS battalion within the IBCT. Combined arms battalions, each with an MGS company, might work. Regardless, the MGS companies should be organized identically to tank companies. If armor will not or cannot provide the company commanders, then the MGS platoons should be handed over to Infantry branch, since that's who is in fact commanding and training them.

CHESTER A. KOJRO
LTC, AR, USAR (Ret.)

Tank Guns on a Howitzer Chassis Might Be Incompatible

Dear Sir:

I heartily second Mr. Douglas' motion that the M113 should be the vehicle of choice for the IBCT (*Letters,* Sep-Oct '01). *ARMOR* reviewed *AIR-MECH-STRIKE: 3 Dimensional Phalanx for the 21st Century,* which is a work in progress on the subject, and gives a conceptual framework and rationale for an M113-based unit. A second edition is in review at present and should be published sometime in 2002.

His comments on using M109-series Self-Propelled Howitzers (SPHs) equipped with the M68 105mm tank cannon needs some background information. The field artillery had M108 105mm SPHs until the early 1970s. They were withdrawn from service and replaced by the 155mm, since the SPHs were designed to support heavy divisions. I imagine, though I'm not certain, that the M108 turrets were removed and M109 turrets were placed on the chassis, along with the necessary plumbing and other changes.

The dual-purpose use of an M68 cannon might be difficult, since tank rounds are fixed cartridges (large rifle rounds) and 105mm howitzer rounds are semi-fixed (a hand-fuzed projectile sits on a casing with individual powder increments inside, which are removed to change the range of the projectile). Tank guns change range by elevation; howitzers change range by elevation and the amount of powder behind the projectile, much like Navy main gun rounds. Tank rounds are fired electrically; howitzers by percussion caps, like black powder cap and ball weapons. There are, or used to be, HEAT rounds for the 105mm howitzer, but the problem is/was acquiring the target and getting the correct range to target for first-round hits. A laser rangefinder (LRF), a ballistic computer (BC), and an AT round (HEAT, HESH and/or APFSDS) would be a great addition to any SPH basic load.

Continued on Page 49

Correction

On page 10 of the November-December 2001 issue, we incorrectly identified the officer at the far right of the photo as MAJ Robert Grow. The officer at the far right facing the camera is the future MG E. N. Harmon.

LETTERS

from Page 4

It might be better to bring back the M108 as an M108A1: 105mm Royal Ordnance howitzer with a 17km range, 30mm Bushmaster II Chain Gun co-ax for direct fire targets, modified commander's turret with an Mk 19 40-mm HVGL/7.62mm minigun (a Vietnam-era AH-1 *Cobra* chin turret based system) with the ability to elevate to 75 degrees, appliqué armor, LRF/BC and an M113 variant as its Field Artillery Ammunition Supply Vehicle, also with the *Cobra* turret. The key is to keep the vehicle weight under 16 tons so it can land via C130 on an unimproved runway. My worry is an M109 chassis won't fit in the C130 and the turret might be too tall if it did. So, would the USAF be willing to risk large airlifters close to a battle zone to bring in artillery? Are there other options for C130 compatibility? Yes, but cost and time get in the way. However, since the LAV III doesn't fit on a C130 and exceeds the 16-ton limit, an M113-based 105mm howitzer/direct fire system variant would be cheaper and available more quickly. As an example, cut off the M113 top deck, place a new top deck with the M108A1 turret in place and you're ready to go. You might want to check *G2mil.com* for other ideas and comments on the same subject.

LARRY A. ALTERSITZ
LTC (Ret.), FA

"India's Tank Fleet" Missed German Engines, Transmissions

Dear Sir:

In the September-October 2001 issue of *ARMOR,* I read your interesting article on India's tank fleet. I think it is very positive that *ARMOR* reports about foreign tanks on a regular basis.

However, I believe there was a mistake concerning the power pack of the Arjun tank (page 31). The production batch of 124 MBTs is equipped with a diesel engine mtu MB 838 Ka-501 and a fully automatic transmission of RENK AG RK 304 S with four forward, two reverse gears and a mechanical 4-speed steering system. For your information, I enclose an article from the company magazine mtu Report, edition 1/2001 of mtu Friedrichshafen GmbH, 88038 Friedrichshafen, Germany. Unfortunately, I only have the article in German language.

GERHARD WITTMANN

Correction to Unit Listing

On page 42, we erroneously listed the 1-14 RSTA Sqdn of I Corps, 2 ID, as 1-14 RECCA Sqdn. The unit is equipped with IAVs and HMMWVs.

Also, 1-33 Armor was listed as part of I Corps, 2 ID, but is now part of 1st Bde, 25 ID.